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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000587

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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, EUR/SCE, AND EUR/SSA, NSC FOR BRAUN,
USUN FOR DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/12/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [UNMIK](#) [YI](#)
SUBJECT: TENSIONS BUILDING OVER NORTHERN KOSOVO

REF: (A) PRISTINA 518 (B) PRISTINA 575 (C) PRISTINA 519

Classified By: COM PHILIP S. GOLDBERG FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. As all concerned enter the Kosovo final status home stretch, the north of Kosovo is increasingly coming into focus as the area where preferred status outcomes potentially collide. UNMIK officials say they have credible reports that Kosovo Serbs in the north are attempting to reinforce de facto partition. COM has urged Prime Minister Ceku to resist the pressure he says is increasing on him to take a government stand on the north. In recent weeks, UNMIK, police, and KFOR have poured security resources into the north, but the jury is still out on the utility of the added presence. In recent days, the presence of USOP officials provoked a reaction from illicit Serbian security personnel. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) UNMIK police and civilian sides are convinced that Belgrade has in recent weeks significantly upped the number of interior ministry police (MUP) illicitly patrolling in the north of Kosovo in plainclothes (ref A). Acting SRSG Steven Schook recently told COM that a well-placed UNMIK source in the north is reporting that the build-up is ongoing and is intended as a means of reinforcing de facto partition. The three northern municipalities, all majority-Serb, meanwhile continue to organize volunteer "self-defense committees" as some variety of neighborhood watch groups to assist the MUP (ref B).

¶3. (C) Kosovo Prime Minister Agim Ceku recently told COM that Kosovo Albanians are increasingly nervous about the north. Ceku said he is becoming frustrated at having nothing to say in response. (NOTE. COM impressed on Ceku in reply that any unilateral PISG action in the north would surely provoke a Kosovo Serb reaction that could only be counterproductive to Pristina's interests, particularly in the final status process. The best thing Ceku could do, COM added, would be to manage the hotheads on this side of the Ibar River that divides Mitrovica and let KFOR and CIVPOL handle the situation on the ground. Ceku acknowledged that there is little else the government can do. END NOTE.) One Kosovo Albanian daily carried a communique on July 12, allegedly authored by the radical Albanian National Army (AKSH), calling on Kosovo Albanians to mobilize in the north "to face

difficulties in the circumstances that may be created by the eternal Serb enemy."

¶4. (C) In this context of increasing tension, USAID officers from Pristina, Belgrade, and Kosovo met with area high school principals on June 30 in north Mitrovica to discuss possible USG assistance. The meetings were routinely substantive, but outside the meeting site (a vocational high school) USOP drivers and security personnel, all ethnic Albanians, were approached by seven Serb men, all dressed casually and apparently unarmed, in an obviously-coordinated action. One USOP employee recognized two of the Serbs as MUP personnel. The encounter ended without confrontation, but its occurrence was the first in several years involving USOP personnel in the north.

¶5. (C) COMMENT. We see four threads of developments in Kosovo's north: KFOR is re-asserting its presence (ref C); Serb municipal leaders are reacting to a perceived up-tick in interethnic violence (ref A); UNMIK is increasing the degree and visibility of the CIVPOL and Kosovo Police Service presence; and the Serbian ministry of the interior is seemingly re-inforcing its illicit police presence. KFOR's return was prompted by a sudden collective international community realization that French KFOR had quietly and inexplicably withdrawn from the north months ago, leaving NATO with no troops north of the Ibar. KFOR does not do policing and its return is not intended to directly address Kosovo Serb concerns over recent violent crimes. Further, KFOR has set up camp (ref C) in Leposavic Municipality, which has not been the venue of the recent violence, and the troops are not necessarily seen by area Serbs as protectors.

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¶6. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED. The major unknown regarding these four developments is the extent to which the reactions of Belgrade and the three northern municipalities are coordinated. The unusual recent reluctance of all three involved mayors to engage USOP officials suggests outside influence and leaves us believing that the hardening of their rhetoric reflects more a calculated decision to also harden the de facto soft partition of the north than an effort to address legitimate security concerns.

¶7. (U) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable for release in its entirety to U.N. Special Envoy for Kosovo Martti Ahtisaari.
GOLDBERG